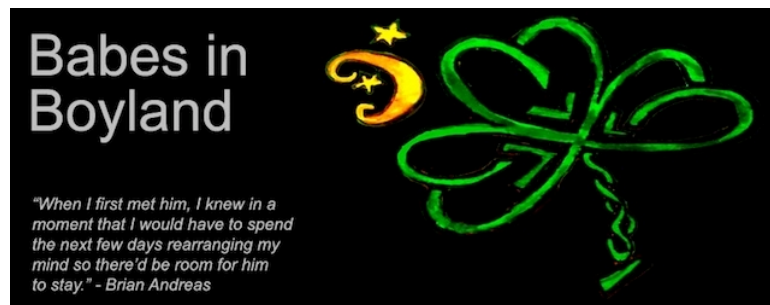




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Episode Ten

by M.J. O'Shea

Quinn's head hurt, his mouth tasted like ass, and muscles that he didn't remember using ever were sore. But damn, he couldn't stop smiling. Craziest shit was, if he felt like smiling *at* someone, there was a candidate lying right there in bed next to

him. Still. Last thing he expected to happen.

I don't do sleepovers. Fucking yeah right.

He reached over and pulled the covers up over tanned golden skin. The perfect, even tan was incongruous with the chilly, watery, late winter air. So was the light smattering of freckles across Oz's back. Quinn found himself wanting to kiss the freckles, taste them. Run his tongue down that smooth golden tan back until he was —

Shit. Time for this asshole to go.

He didn't do feelings. No more than he did sleepovers, repeat performances, or half of the shit he'd found himself wanting to do with Oz fucking Cotten, crown prince of Boxer Falls.

Quinn nudged the sleeping body that was sprawled way too comfortably in his bed. "Hey, Oz. Wake up. It's morning." Barely. A glance at his clock said five.

"Mmph." Oz rolled over and cocooned himself in Quinn's covers — covers that smelled like sex and sweat and cum and all the shit he liked to wash out of his bed the second the grunts and slapping skin quieted. Usually. Hell if he could say why it didn't bother him like it always had.

Just then, Oz grabbed Quinn's hand and pulled it under his arm and between his pecs, dropping a kiss on one startled as hell palm. His ass, that pretty muscled ass, nuzzled right up to Quinn's suddenly interested crotch, and he grunted happily and settled back in for more relaxation.

Cuddling? Fucking cuddling? That was about seven hundred steps further than

Quinn was willing to go with anyone, even the hottest lay he'd had in months, years maybe. Even the guy who'd lost it to him and loved every second of it. Quinn tried to push away from Oz with every part that wasn't currently being held captive, but the guy was strong. Must've been all those poster boy pinup muscles. Quinn was pretty damn sure he'd never put in a real day's work in his life.

"Go back to sleep, babe," Oz mumbled, clearly not awake himself. "Tired."

Babe? Jesus hell in fuck. Sure, the guy was half comatose but that was too much. Quinn tried to wriggle out once more, then collapsed, no longer interested in moving, and found himself squeezing that muscular chest in a hug. *Squeezing, for God's sake. Hugging.* It was hard not to want to.

He closed his eyes to sleep, since he wasn't going anywhere. Problem was, the first thing he saw in the darkness of his closed eyes was Oz's face when he came on that second time around, hours after Quinn had told himself to get rid of the guy, how he shivered and covered Quinn's hands with his own, moaned and whispered Quinn's name. He pictured himself in the same position, riding Oz for all he was worth, twining their fingers together and crying out Oz's name. Worst of all he wanted to kiss him. And not the rough "fuck me now" kisses of the night before, but tender and sweet and slow.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

Quinn was disgusted. He didn't motherfucking do any of it. None. Too bad he was doing it. And he wanted more. *Fall asleep, ya douche.* Sleep had never been hard to

come by for Quinn. He could drop off at the snap of his fingers if he so chose, but it was hard that cold early morning. Hard to lose the pictures of Oz's pleasure, the memory of his own.

Hard to forget Vic's face staring in the window, intent and silent. Question was, which one of them was Vic watching? And why?

* * *

Why do I get myself into this shit?

Dead bodies. Oz. Murder. Not what he signed up for when he moved to Boxer Falls. *Crazy people*. He worried that he might be the craziest of all.

Yoshi grunted with effort when he hauled the bag carrying Kurt Brandt out of the trunk of his car. Damn body was cold and it weighed a ton. Fit the term stiff too. It had been refrigerated to the point of being nearly impossible to move. Yoshi lost control of the bag when part of it got caught on his trunk latch and it slid with a loud crunch to the gravel lot at his feet.

Damn it. He waited, heart crashing for long silent moments, to make sure no one had heard the noise. To him, it might as well have been a bomb. Silence, still and dark. Good thing. Yoshi picked the bag back up, but the feet still dangled on the ground. He cursed his heritage and wished he'd spent more time in the gym as he started to pull the body towards the trees.

Gotta remember to cover the marks. A set of footprints would be unremarkable, but footprints and the marks of a dragged heavy object? That would raise questions. He watched CSI. He knew how those guys worked. The bag got heavier the closer he got to the trail. It almost felt good. Meant he was suffering for love. Yoshi smiled. Oz would love him if he suffered.

He had to turn the bag around drag the it up the steps by the feet all the way to the trailhead – one step at a time, wincing every time the guy's head hit a corner. A few times he had to yank when the plastic got stuck. The crunch made him sick. Sure, Brandt was dead, but he deserved some respect in his chilly afterlife. It wasn't like Yoshi ever thought he'd be hauling a stiff. His mother would be horrified. But he had to save Oz. Oz. If Oz loved him, it would all be worth it.

By the time Yoshi got to the place he'd picked out the day before, It was still dark and cold enough that it hurt to breathe. His asthma always kicked up at the worst times. It was fine, though. Controllable. He had a lot of work to do. The shovel was waiting for him, propped up against a tree hidden from sight.

I've gotta work quickly. Before some well meaning park ranger comes by to offer assistance.

That was the last thing he needed. What he was doing was risky, and could get him in a hell of a lot of trouble, alibi or not. But he was going to help Oz. He *had* to help Oz. He couldn't let the medical examiner get a hold of Brandt. If they got a good look at the body, they'd know it was Oz who killed him, just like Yoshi knew. He didn't have

proof yet, but it *had* to be Oz. And once they saw Brandt they'd know...

Yoshi was never going to let that happen. *I've got your back, Oz. Even if you never find out.*

* * *

"Fuck, Adam, you feel so damn good." Zach moaned and arched his back, squirming from Adam's tongue meandering its way down his gorgeous as hell abs.

Adam had been waiting to touch and lick and fuck that beautiful body for what felt like a lifetime. And not just the body. He needed Zach's voice telling him how perfect it was between them, Zach's moans filling the air. He needed Zach.

"You want me?" Adam asked. It was scary and exhilarating. Full of yes and fuck and why did we wait so damn long?

"Now, baby. Please. I've wanted you for so long..." Zach arched again, wonton and gorgeously debauched. It was exactly where Adam needed him to be.

"I've wanted this too. Forever." Adam reached for the lube, and nothing else. Nothing between him and his Zach.

"Fuck me, please. Just...just fuck. I need it. I need you."

Adam pushed slowly into Zach's tight body, not wanting to miss a moment of it...

"How come you left without saying goodbye this morning?" Shit! Adam jumped and looked up from the eggs he was scrambling to find Zach looking at him. Zach He was pale, tired looking. Gorgeous. Adam bit the inside of his cheek. He hated himself

for caring. And for being such a dumb ass that all he could do was think about something that would never happen.

"I had to go to work. You were all fucked up and passed out." *Next to me in bed. I wanted to touch you so bad.* It wasn't something Adam made a habit of. Nights in bed next to Zach were dangerous but he didn't feel like another seven hours camped on his couch.

"Sorry, dude. That drink kind of fucked with my head."

Adam froze. "What drink?"

"That shot I did with Sam, you know Rider's friend?" Zach shrugged like it was no big deal. It *was* a big deal. Zach had been all over him half the night, hugs and even a kiss or two. Zach was never like that. Not with him. Adam had thought that maybe...

I'm so fucking pathetic.

Zach laughed, mirthless and soft. "What, you think he drugged my drink or something? So I could go home and pass out with you? That would be pointless. Besides, him and Rider were practically fucking on the dance floor. I wouldn't be surprised if they *were* fucking in the bathroom."

Adam didn't want to hear about Rider. He wanted Zach to remember touching him. He wanted it to not be a fluke. "Sam seems like an okay guy. I don't think he drugged you. You were probably just really drunk."

"Probably." Zach looked dubious though. Or maybe like he was thinking about what he'd done the night before. Adam waited for the embarrassment to crawl up his

face when he remembered the hugging and kissing all the sweet touches. It never came. Zach must've been messier than he'd thought. Other than the affection, he'd seemed pretty normal. *Not analyzing the level of my best friend's smashedness. He didn't fucking mean to be all hot on me.*

"Listen, I gotta work. You want some breakfast? Coffee?"

"Yeah. Eggs please. And those hash browns you make? Nobody else's are as good as yours."

"Okay, but you gotta –"

"Can't I just stay in here for a while? I don't feel like being alone." Those eyes killed him. Usually sparkling and happy, they looked lost. Sad.

"Zach..." Adam wanted him to stay. He always did. As long as he didn't have to look at Zach and picture Tony, or whatever married asshole Zach was drooling over. There had to be one. There always was. It was never *him* on Zach's mind. Always in the background waiting patiently for whatever scrap of attention was left over. *Jesus*

"Please?" Zach was already sitting on the counter, arranged between stainless steel canisters of pre-chopped peppers and onions.

"Don't you have to work today?" He didn't really want to get rid of Zach, but he had to at least look like he tried.

Zach shrugged. "I told you last night something was up with my dads. I was supposed to wax all the banisters and the paneling in the foyer today but they're making my skin crawl. I don't wanna go home."

"What do you think is the matter?"

"Fuck if I know. I'm not getting into their drama. I know they think I don't pay attention but sometimes I'm smarter than I look." Zach fiddled with a slice of cheddar and popped a chunk in his mouth. "Hey did you hear from that place in the Hamptons?"

Adam had. He'd turned them down, though. Zach wasn't going to find that out. When they left, they left together. "Nah. I think they hired locally." Adam cracked three eggs into a bowl, whisked them with salt pepper and *herbes de provence*, just like Zach liked it. Then he poured the eggs onto his hot griddle. "You want sausage?"

Zach chuckled evilly. "You know the answer to that."

"Dude. You're twelve."

He piled a mixture of shredded potatoes and fontina cheese on the griddle next to Zach's eggs.

"You gotta get a job somewhere and get outta here." Zach nudged him with a shoulder. "You're way too good for this place."

"We gotta get outta here. We."

Zach leaned over and laid his head on Adam's shoulder. Adam couldn't help the way his heart picked up. Zach had never been so affectionate. What was up with him?

"I don't get you," Zach murmured.

Adam shook Zach's head off gently and moved to get a plate. He slid the eggs onto the plate and stuck it into the warming oven until Zach's potatoes and sausages

were done.

"I don't get you either. Maybe that's why we're friends. You wanna kick it at my place until I'm off? I'll give you the key. You did lock the door, didn't you?"

Zach rolled his eyes. "Yeah. 'Course. Though I don't know what shit of yours anyone would want."

"Fuck off. You have no idea what my pans are worth. And my knives." He pulled Zach's plate out from the warming oven and added the sausage links and the cheesy potatoes. "Here. Eat. Then go back to my place and sleep or something. I've got a few more hours."

"Love you, man," Zach said, looking at the plate on the counter beside him.

Adam's stomach clenched. "Love you, too," he squeaked out. If that wasn't the most awkward shit in the world.

Zach lifted his head and gave Adam the most liquid, vulnerable look Adam had ever seen from him. Worse than the night at the falls after breakup number seven...or was it eight? Worse than that time when they were kids and that one Brad douche had bullied him out of his baseball cards.

"What's the matter, huh?"

"I just feel weird. I don't know. And I thought I was hungry but now..."

"Eat that." Adam poked at the plate with his spatula. "You'll feel better."

Zach reached up to cup Adam's face, honest to God touch him. Adam reached out too, ready to reciprocate whatever Zach was about to start.

He nearly screamed with frustration when the squeaky front door and a bell signaled customers. Of course he was short one late (and most likely hung over) waiter.

It was Rider. Jesus. And his friend Sam. No matter what he'd said about Sam earlier, Adam was wary of him. The guy had no reason to help him with Gino. At least none that Adam was aware of. Yet.

"Shit," he murmured. I better go seat them." He wished they'd just leave.

"You want me to do it?" Zach asked? He hopped down from the counter and shoved a few bites of his breakfast in his mouth.

"Yeah?" Adam hated dealing with the customers.

"Sure."

Zach turned to go, but before he did he gave Adam one more odd look, long and pensive, over his shoulder.

"What?" Adam asked.

Zach huffed out a breath and shook his head. "Nothin'."

Zach grabbed a few menus and went to seat Rider and his friend Sam. Sam gave him the willies, and he knew that had to count for something cause half the time even when he was supposed to get a bad vibe about someone, he didn't. Sam was just all intense, like he might be ex military. Too much with the staring and the knowing looks. Plus the guy was hanging out with Rider Cotten. Never a good sign.

"Morning. Would you like a window booth?" He asked. *Polite, professional, don't make eye contact.* It wasn't his job, but he didn't want to make Adam look bad.

"That would be fine," Sam answered authoritatively. Like he spoke for Rider.

Weird.

"Follow me." Zach led them to a nice window booth, way the hell away from him and Adam in the kitchen and handed them their menus. "Coffee will be out in a minute. Can I get you anything else?"

"Did you have fun last night?" Sam asked slyly.

"What do you mean?"

"I meant did you have fun? Did you feel good after that shot?"

Fuck. I knew it. No matter what he'd said to Adam, Zach had felt weird the night before. His belly tingled, every brush of the skin was intense, and the way he'd wanted to touch Adam, kiss, taste. It had been nearly impossible to resist. He hoped to hell Adam didn't remember how touchy feely he'd been. Not likely. Adam had been mostly sober and he'd been giving Zach weird looks all morning.

"What did you put in my drink?"

Sam shrugged. "Just some E. Thought you might like to sample the merchandise."

"What for?" He asked. Even with his lack of experience, he knew that guys like Sam rarely did anything without reason. Or repercussion.

"Mmm, the waffles sound delicious," Sam said casually to Rider. "With blueberries."

"Why did you give me the drugs?" Zach asked again with more force.

"Careful, local boy. I was about to do you a favor. Wouldn't want to seem rude, would you?"

"I don't need a favor. Not from you."

"That's not what I hear. Word around town is you need some cash. You're tired of working odd jobs and wanna get out of here."

"Who doesn't?" Zach shrugged. He tried to look casual, not like Sam was creeping him out with that intense, dark stare.

"Well, Rider and I have a lovely crop of good times pharmaceuticals and we need someone to help us distribute them. Someone who knows the local scene."

"I'm not a fucking drug dealer," Zach hissed. He turned to go back to the kitchen.

"That's too bad," Sam went back to flipping through his menu. "Tell your friend Adam congrats by the way. I heard he got an offer from that hotel in The Hamptons. It would be a shame if he had to leave you here."

Zach's chest clenched. As many times as he'd tried to push Adam away from Boxer Falls and him, the thought of actually being there alone without his best friend was terrifying.

"I'm sure he's excited. I'll go get your coffee and be back for your order."

Zach's hands trembled when he tried to pick up the coffee pot. He had the handles of two mugs hooked on his pinky and they clicked together gratingly every time he started thinking of Adam packing a van and leaving him. *Why did he lie?* He had no doubt that Sam was telling the truth. Guys like that stirred up trouble, but they were

too smart to get caught in a lie.

He wasn't going to confront Adam, though. Not yet. Adam had to be protecting him. Made him feel guilty as hell. Maybe it was time he did his part, too. Get some money together so he could help them get out of town. Zach knew he didn't have much going for him, but Adam... Adam had a future. And Zach wasn't going to let that future slip away.

He carried the coffee and mugs back to their best corner table, where Sam was lounging laconically with Rider, whose gaze was adoring. Pathetic, Zach thought.

"Fine. I'll do it," he whispered as he sat their cups down and filled them. "Don't tell Adam. He'll just freak out."

Sam gave him a slow smile. "Deal."

* * *

"Mmm, morning," Oz mumbled. He didn't want to open his eyes beyond the slit that let in the barest little bit of morning light. "Quinn?" He felt all loose and relaxed and maybe a little headachy from the Grey Goose but nowhere near the panic he thought he'd feel waking up in a guy's bed for the first time — a drifter, a bartender... nothing Oz wanted. But it had been the best sex of his life. Until a rough hand was detangling itself from his and pushing him away.

"Yeah. Morning. Time to go." Quinn rolled to the other side of the bed.

Oz squeezed his eyes shut and opened them again.

"Go?" It wasn't like he thought he'd stick around for brunch and happily ever after but a "good morning" fuck would've been nice, or at least a "see you later" blow job.

"Yeah. Go. We're not going to shower together and kiss over the goddamn toaster. I have shit to do."

Oz's stomach coiled. "What the fuck? You stuck your dick in my ass *twice* and now you're kicking me out?"

Quinn snorted and rolled off the bed collecting underwear and sweatpants and shirt from a drawer. "I'm going to hit the shower. You know where the door is."

Oz wanted to roll under the bed and disappear. Nobody ever treated him like he didn't matter. Nobody. Most of the time it was *him* trying to get the chicks out of his bed so he could go about his day and not cuddle for hours. How could he have been so dumb? The worst part was that he wanted Quinn. He'd liked the idea of waking up, rolling over, and starting it all again. Instead, all he got was brushed off.

This is what Rider and his dad were after? Screw men. First Vic with that guy behind the bar and now Quinn and his attitude like he was actually good enough to fuck a Cotten and kick him to the curb in the morning? Oz jammed his foot into his slacks and stood, yanking the zipper up. He winced when it nipped him on raw, sensitive skin. *Shit. Get a grip.*

He didn't know who Quinn thought he was. Fucking nobody bartender and his

cheap fucking apartment, and his firecrotch were going to wish they'd never fucked with Oswald Cotten.

Shoes on, shirt slung awkwardly over his shoulders, he scanned the tiny apartment for his keys. He thought he'd been the last one to have them when the clothes started coming off, but fuck, where were they? Oz needed to get out, before the shower water turned off, before someone on the street saw his car – too damn late for that. It had been there all night. If anyone in Quinn's working class neighborhood knew what Oz's car looked like then half the town already knew where he was.

The knob in the bathroom squeaked, loud and in stereo through cheap thin walls, and then there was the scratch of the curtain opening and closing. Oz needed to get out immediately. *There!* The glint of keys, on the ground near the kitchen bar.

...wine spilling, hot kissing, his lips suctioned around Quinn's hard as hell cock.... Oz slammed his eyes shut, trying to squeeze out the images. It had been a mistake. A huge mistake.

He lunged for the keys and just made it to the door before his phone buzzed in his pocket. His battery was low and he wasn't in the damn mood to talk to anyone. Especially Vic. And that's whose name popped up on his caller id. Oz hit ignore and slunk to his car, looking right or left for anyone who'd recognize him. Not likely in Quinn's neighborhood, but the town was small. He slid in and started the engine, adrenalin pumping from the fear of being seen.

His phone rang again. *Jesus, Vic.* He was probably calling to explain that whole

scene in the alley. Oz didn't want to hear it. He pressed ignore a second time. Fuck, was he done with men. His phone beeped with a text:

Oz. Call me. We have a problem. The body is missing.

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- *Will Quinn break Oz's heart, or will Oz see to it that Quinn never works in Boxer Falls again?*
 - *Does Yoshi know something that everyone else is missing...or is it him that's missing something? (Like his marbles.)*
 - *Will Zach and Adam find out what Sam really wants with them?*
-

TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!

Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...

AUTHOR BIO

I grew up, and still live, in sunny Washington state and while I love to visit other places, I can't imagine calling anywhere else home. I spent my childhood writing stories. Sometime in my early teens, the stories turned to romance. Most of those were about me, my friends, and our favorite tv stars. Hopefully, I've come a long way since then...

When I'm not writing, I love to play the piano and cook and paint pictures...and of course read. It's nearly impossible to work on my own writing when I've gotten myself hooked into a great new book :) I like sparkly girly girl things, own at least twenty different colored headbands, and I have a little white dog with a ginger eye spot who sits with me when I write. Sometimes she comes up with ideas for me too...when she's not napping. Find out more at:

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